

Message Text

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ACTION HEW-06

INFO OCT-01 EUR-12 EA-09 NEA-10 ISO-00 OES-05 NAS-01

CIAE-00 INR-07 NSAE-00 /051 W
----- 060743

R 121523Z JAN 76

FM AMEMBASSY LONDON
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 7998
INFO AMEMBASSY BONN
AMEMBASSY BUCHAREST
AMEMBASSY CANBERRA
AMEMBASSY COPENHAGEN
AMEMBASSY MOSCOW
AMEMBASSY OTTAWA
AMEMBASSY PARIS
AMEMBASSY STOCKHOLM
AMEMBASSY TEL AVIV
AMEMBASSY THE HAGUE
AMEMBASSY TOKYO
AMEMBASSY WARSAW
AMEMBASSY WELLINGTON

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DEPT PASS NATIONAL INSTITUTES OF HEALTH, FOGARTY
INTERNATIONAL CENTER, BETHESDA, MARYLAND 20014 FOR
DR. JOSEPH R. QUINN

E.O. 11652: L/A

TAGS: TPHY OQCI UK

SUBJECT: HOST GOVERNMENT'S CONSTRAINTS ON SCIENTISTS
DOING RESEARCH ON DNA/RNA RECOMBINANTS

REF: STATE 298844

1. INQUIRIES TO UK DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION AND SCIENCE
AND MEDICAL RESEARCH COUNCIL INDICATE THAT AT PRESENT
TIME THERE ARE NO LAWS IN GREAT BRITAIN SPECIFICALLY
GOVERNING RESEARCH PROCEDURES IN SO-CALLED "GENETIC
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ENGINEERING" OR WORK ON DNA/RNA RECOMBINANTS. THE

SCIENTIFIC COMMUNITY IS, HOWEVER, OPERATING UNDER A VOLUNTARY MORATORIUM ON SUCH RESEARCH. THIS MORATORIUM WAS ESTABLISHED IN 1974 BY THE MEDICAL RESEARCH COUNCIL, FOLLOWING THE JULY 1974 APPEAL BY THE COMMITTEE ON RECOMBINANT MOLECULES OF THE US ACADEMY OF SCIENCES. THE MRC, BY VIRTUE OF ITS STATUS AS THE PRINCIPAL GRANT-GIVING AGENCY IN UK BIOLOGICAL RESEARCH, IS IN AN EXCELLENT POSITION TO ENFORCE THIS MORATORIUM IN THE GOVERNMENT AND ACADEMIC RESEARCH COMMUNITY. THE SITUATION IN PRIVATE INDUSTRY IS UNCERTAIN, BUT IT SEEMS LIKELY THAT THE MORATORIUM IS ALSO BEING OBSERVED IN THAT SECTOR.

2. SHORTLY AFTER THE NAS ACTION, THE ADVISORY BOARD OF THE SCIENTIFIC RESEARCH COUNCILS OF THE UK SET UP A WORKING PARTY UNDER THE CHAIRMANSHIP OF LORD ASHBY TO MAKE AN ASSESSMENT OF THE POTENTIAL BENEFITS AND POTENTIAL HAZARDS OF EXPERIMENTAL MANIPULATION OF THE GENETIC COMPOSITION OF MICRO-ORGANISMS. THE REPORT OF THE ASHBY WORKING PARTY WAS ISSUED EARLY IN 1975 AS A WHITE PAPER, CMND 5880. A COPY OF THIS REPORT IS BEING FORWARDED TO DR. JOSEPH R. QUINN UNDER SEPARATE COVER.

3. THE ESSENTIAL CONCLUSION OF THE ASHBY STUDY WAS THAT THE POTENTIAL BENEFITS OF THIS TYPE OF BIOLOGICAL RESEARCH (GENETIC MANIPULATION) GREATLY EXCEEDS THE POTENTIAL HAZARDS, SUBJECT TO RIGOROUS SAFEGUARDS ON THE WAY IN WHICH THE RESEARCH IS CARRIED OUT. AS A NEXT LOGICAL STEP, THE DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION AND SCIENCE ESTABLISHED A SECOND COMMITTEE UNDER PROFESSOR R.E.O. WILLIAMS, THE DIRECTOR OF THE CENTRAL PUBLIC HEALTH LABORATORIES, TO RECOMMEND A SET OF GUIDELINES FOR GENETIC MANIPULATION RESEARCH AND TO STUDY THE QUESTION AS TO HOW BEST TO

NOTE BY OCT: NOT PASSED.

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CIAE-00 INR-07 NSAE-00 /051 W
----- 060756

R 121523Z JAN 76
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TO SECSTATE WASHDC 7999
INFO AMEMBASSY BONN
AMEMBASSY BUCHAREST
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ENFORCE THESE GUIDELINES IN PRACTICE. THE WILLIAMS COMMITTEE IS STILL SITTING AND IS NOT EXPECTED TO REPORT UNTIL MAY OR JUNE OF 1976. IT IS THE COMMITTEE'S INTENTION TO TAKE TESTIMONY FROM INDUSTRY AND TRADES UNION REPRESENTATIVES AS WELL AS FROM THE SCIENTIFIC COMMUNITY.

4. WE ARE INFORMED BY THE MRC THAT ALTHOUGH A NUMBER OF PROPOSALS FOR WORK IN GENETIC MANIPULATION HAD BEEN RECEIVED BY THE COUNCIL PRIOR TO THE IMPOSITION OF THE MORATORIUM. NM WORK HAD ACTUALLY BEEN FUNDED. HOWEVER, THE APPRECIABLE PERIOD OF TIME FOR WHICH THE MORATORIUM HAS LASTED IS NOW CAUSING PRESSURES FROM THE SCIENTIFIC UNCLASSIFIED

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COMMUNITY FOR AN EARLY DECISION ON EXPERIMENTAL GUIDELINES. THE WILLIAMS COMMITTEE WILL NO DOUBT BE INFLUENCED IN THIS MATTER BY THE GUIDELINES RECENTLY ISSUED BY THE RECOMBINANT DNA MOLECULE PROGRAM ADVISORY COMMITTEE OF NIH. THEY WILL ALSO BE GUIDED BY THE RECENT WHITE PAPER, CMND 6054, ON THE LABORATORY CONTROL OF DANGEROUS PATHOGENS (GODBER WORKING PARTY).

5. IT SEEMS CERTAIN THAT IN ADDITION TO RECOMMENDATIONS OF LABORATORY EXPERIMENTAL GUIDELINES, THE WILLIAMS COMMITTEE WILL ALSO RECOMMEND TO THE UK GOVERNMENT THAT A CENTRAL ADVISORY BODY OF SOME TYPE BE ESTABLISHED TO

MONITOR ALL RESEARCH IN THIS FIELD. WHETHER THIS BODY WOULD HAVE STATUTORY POWERS IS AS YET UNCERTAIN, BUT POWERS TO INSPECT WOULD SEEM TO BE A LOGICAL STEP FROM THE PUBLIC VIEWPOINT. IT HAS ALSO BEEN SUGGESTED WITHIN THE DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION AND SCIENCE THAT CONTROL AND INSPECTION RESPONSIBILITIES COULD LOGICALLY BE HOUSED IN THE RECENTLY FORMED HEALTH AND SAFETY COMMISSION OF THE DEPARTMENT OF EMPLOYMENT. HOWEVER, IT REMAINS TO BE SEEN WHETHER THE WILLIAMS COMMITTEE WILL GO THIS FAR.

RICHARDSON

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Message Attributes

Automatic Decaptioning: X
Capture Date: 01 JAN 1994
Channel Indicators: n/a
Current Classification: UNCLASSIFIED
Concepts: MEDICAL RESEARCH, GENETICS
Control Number: n/a
Copy: SINGLE
Draft Date: 12 JAN 1976
Decaption Date: 01 JAN 1960
Decaption Note:
Disposition Action: n/a
Disposition Approved on Date:
Disposition Authority: n/a
Disposition Case Number: n/a
Disposition Comment:
Disposition Date: 01 JAN 1960
Disposition Event:
Disposition History: n/a
Disposition Reason:
Disposition Remarks:
Document Number: 1976LONDON00463
Document Source: CORE
Document Unique ID: 00
Drafter: n/a
Enclosure: n/a
Executive Order: N/A
Errors: N/A
Film Number: D760010-0753
From: LONDON
Handling Restrictions: n/a
Image Path:
ISecure: 1
Legacy Key: link1976/newtext/t19760166/aaaacgww.tel
Line Count: 180
Locator: TEXT ON-LINE, ON MICROFILM
Office: ACTION HEW
Original Classification: UNCLASSIFIED
Original Handling Restrictions: n/a
Original Previous Classification: n/a
Original Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Page Count: 4
Previous Channel Indicators: n/a
Previous Classification: n/a
Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Reference: 75 STATE 298844
Review Action: RELEASED, APPROVED
Review Authority: blochd0
Review Comment: n/a
Review Content Flags:
Review Date: 01 JUN 2004
Review Event:
Review Exemptions: n/a
Review History: RELEASED <01 JUN 2004 by barnescd>; APPROVED <10 NOV 2004 by blochd0>
Review Markings:

Margaret P. Grafeld
Declassified/Released
US Department of State
EO Systematic Review
04 MAY 2006

Review Media Identifier:
Review Referrals: n/a
Review Release Date: n/a
Review Release Event: n/a
Review Transfer Date:
Review Withdrawn Fields: n/a
Secure: OPEN
Status: NATIVE
Subject: HOST GOVERNMENT'S CONSTRAINTS ON SCIENTISTS DOING RESEARCH ON DNA/RNA RECOMBINANTS
TAGS: TPHY, OSCI, UK
To: STATE
Type: TE
Markings: Margaret P. Grafeld Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 04 MAY 2006